

MAINTAINING MORALITY IN THE CURRENT ERA: THE HISTORY OF MODERN ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

Nur Rohmaniyah Wafda
Email : nurrohmaniyahwafda@gmail.com
(STAI Ihyaul Ulum Gresik)

Abstract

Modern Islamic education in Indonesia has developed in response to social, cultural, and intellectual challenges that have arisen alongside modernization and globalization. This article aims to analyze the history of the growth of modern Islamic education and its contribution to maintaining the morals of the younger generation amid changing times. Using a historical approach and descriptive analysis, this study reveals the changes in the Islamic education system from a traditional pattern to a more modern, adaptive, and integrative model. The findings show that modern Islamic education continues to place moral guidance as its main objective, despite ongoing reforms in the curriculum, learning methods, and institutional management. Modern Islamic education plays an important role in establishing a balance between intellectual and spiritual progress and moral formation as the foundation of national character in the contemporary era.

Keywords: Modern Islamic Education, History of Islamic Education, Morals, National Morals, Globalization.

INTRODUCTION

The increasingly rapid changes of the times, marked by the tide of modernization and technological developments, have had a significant impact on various areas of life, including education. These dynamics not only affect learning systems and strategies, but also have implications for the formation of the morals and character of the younger generation. In this situation, Islamic education in Indonesia faces the challenge of continuing to adapt to the times without neglecting the moral and spiritual values that characterize it.

Historically, the emergence of modern Islamic education in Indonesia was a response to the social and intellectual changes that developed since the early 20th century. The shift from traditional education patterns to a more modern model was carried out in an effort to integrate the demands of progress with the need to foster morals. Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and modern Islamic educational institutions have become important spaces for harmonizing Islamic teachings with science and contemporary education systems.

Within this framework, modern Islamic education is not solely oriented towards the mastery of knowledge, but also plays a strategic role in maintaining the moral values of

students. Therefore, the discussion of the history of modern Islamic education in Indonesia is relevant to see how the process of adapting Islamic education to the times has taken place without abandoning its main function.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on tracing the history of the development of modern Islamic education in Indonesia and its role in maintaining morals amid changing times. Data sources were obtained from relevant scientific literature, including books, academic journals, scientific articles, and supporting documents discussing modern Islamic education and moral guidance.

Data collection was carried out through critical reading, note-taking, and classification of information related to the research focus. The collected data was then analyzed using descriptive-analytical techniques, namely by systematically describing and interpreting the content of the sources to obtain a complete picture of the dynamics of modern Islamic education. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of a narrative description that emphasizes the relationship between the history of modern Islamic education and its role in shaping morals.

CONTENTS OF DISCUSSION

1. Historical Background of Islamic Education in Indonesia

The development of Islam in Indonesia has given rise to several theories, including the Gujarat, Mecca, and Persia theories. However, there are also other theories about the early development of Islam in Indonesia.

In general, the development of Islam in Indonesia, both in religion and tradition, occurred after the Indonesian people interacted with various nations, marked by the establishment of trade relations between the archipelago and its neighbors, both in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Arab countries.

➤ The arrival of Islam in Indonesia

According to the book “Sejarah Indonesia Periode Islam” (History of Indonesia in the Islamic Period) by Ricu Sidiq and colleagues, history records that since the beginning of the Common Era, traders from India and China have had trade relations with the people of Indonesia.

This opinion is based on Marco Polo's travel notes, which explain that he stopped in Perlak in 1292 and met people who had converted to Islam.

Further evidence to support this opinion is the discovery of the tombstone of King Samudra Pasai, Sultan Malik al Saleh, dated 1297.

If we go from west to east, Islam first came to Perlak, in northern Sumatra. This is because of Perlak's strategic location in the Malacca Strait, an international trade route from west to east.

Islam entered Java through the northern coast of the island, marked by the discovery of the tomb of Fatimah binti Maimun bin Hibatullah, who died in 475 Hijri or 1082 AD in the village of Leran, Manyar District, Gresik.

Then in Kalimantan, Islam entered through Pontianak, spread by an Arab nobleman named Sultan Syarif Abdurrahman in the 18th century. At the headwaters of the Pawan River, in Ketapang, West Kalimantan, ancient Islamic tombs were found. The oldest year on these tombs is 1340 Saka (1418 AD).

In East Kalimantan, Islam entered through the Kutai Kingdom, brought by two religious preachers from Minangkabau named Tuan Haji Bandang and Tuan Haji Tunggang Parangan.

In South Kalimantan, Islam entered through the Banjar Kingdom, spread by Dayyan, a khatib (preacher) from Demak. In Central Kalimantan, evidence of the arrival of Islam was found in the Ki Gede mosque in Kotawaringin, which bears the inscription 1434 AD.

In Sulawesi, Islam was introduced by the king and people of Gowa-Tallo. The arrival of Islam in Sulawesi is recorded in the Lontara Bilang. According to this record, the first king to convert to Islam was Kanjeng Matoaya, the fourth king of Tallo, who converted in 1603. It is estimated that Islam in this region was spread by.

- Media in Islamization

The book "History of Indonesia in the Islamic Period" also explains the media or channels in the development of Islam in Indonesia, including:

1. Trade

In the early stages, the channel of Islamization was trade. The busy trade traffic from the 7th to the 16th centuries AD led Muslim traders (Arab, Persian, and Indian) to take part in trade with countries in Western, Southeast, and Eastern Asia.

Islamization through trade was considered very beneficial because kings and nobles participated directly in trade activities.

2. Marriage

From an economic perspective, Muslim merchants had a higher social status than most natives, so the native population, especially noblewomen, were attracted to becoming the wives of merchants.

When marrying an Islamic merchant, the prerequisite was to first convert to Islam. Starting from there, many villages, regions, and Muslim kingdoms were married to descendants of the nobility.

3. Sufism

One channel of Islamization that is considered to have played a significant role in the spread of Islam is Sufism.

In the context of the spread of Islam in the archipelago, Sufi teachers taught a form of theosophy mixed with teachings that were already widely known by the Indonesian people.

4. Education

Islamization was also carried out through education. The process of Islamic education and teaching has been going on since Islam entered the archipelago. When there were many Muslims and a Muslim community had been formed, the process of Islamic education and teaching was no longer carried out informally, but was carried out regularly in certain places. In general, there were two models of education at that time, namely langgar education and pesantren education.

5. Arts

The most famous channel of Islamization through art was wayang performances. It is said that Sunan Kalijaga was the most skilled figure in performing wayang. Sunan Kalijaga never asked for payment for his performances, but he asked the audience to follow him in reciting the shahada. Most of the wayang stories were still taken from the Mahabharata and Ramayana, but Islamic teachings and the names of Islamic heroes were inserted into the stories. Other arts were also used as tools of Islamization, such as literature (hikayat, babad, etc.), architecture, and carving.

6. Politics

In Maluku and South Sulawesi, most people converted to Islam after their kings embraced Islam first. The political influence of kings greatly helped the spread of Islam in these areas. In addition, in Sumatra, Java, and eastern Indonesia, Islamic kingdoms fought non-Islamic kingdoms for political reasons. The political victories of Islamic kingdoms attracted many people from non-Islamic kingdoms to convert to Islam.

➤ The Role of Guardians and Clerics

One way of spreading Islam was through preaching. In addition to being traders, early Muslim traders also acted as preachers.

There were also preachers who accompanied traders on their missions. The spread of Islam through preaching was carried out by clerics who visited the communities they were preaching to, using a socio-cultural approach.

This pattern used a form of acculturation, which is the use of local culture infused with Islamic teachings. In addition, these scholars also established Islamic boarding schools as a means of Islamic education.

On the island of Java, the spread of Islam was carried out by the Wali Songo (9 saints). A wali is a person who has reached a certain level in drawing closer to Allah.

The nine saints are as follows:

1. Sunan Gresik (Maulana Malik Ibrahim), spread Islam around Gresik.
2. Sunan Ampel (Raden Rahmat), spread Islam in Ampel, Surabaya, East Java.
3. Sunan Drajat (Syarifudin), spread Islam around Surabaya
4. Sunan Bonang (Makdum Ibrahim), spread Islam in Tuban, Lasem, and Rembang.
5. Sunan Kalijaga (Raden Mas Said/Jaka Said), spread Islam in Central Java.
6. Sunan Giri (Raden Paku), spread Islam outside Java, namely Madura, Bawean, Nusa Tenggara, and Maluku.
7. Sunan Kudus (Jafar Sodiq), spread Islam in Kudus, Central Java.
8. Sunan Muria (Raden Umar Said) spread Islam on the slopes of Mount Muria, located between Jepara and Kudus, Central Java.
9. Sunan Gunung Jati (Syarif Hidayatullah) spread Islam in Banten, Sunda Kelapa, and Cirebon.

That is the development of Islam from its early history to the era of the Wali Songo.¹

2. The Emergence of Modern Islamic Education

The emergence of modern Islamic education in Indonesia cannot be separated from the social, political, and intellectual dynamics of Muslims in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. During this period, Muslims were in a situation of backwardness due to Western colonialism, which not only controlled the territory but also the education system. Traditional Islamic education, such as pesantren, surau, and dayah, succeeded in preserving the faith, worship, and morals of the people, but was considered incapable of responding to the challenges of the modern era, especially in the fields of science, technology, and social administration.

On the other hand, the Dutch colonial government introduced Western education that was systematic, structured, and oriented towards modern science. However, this education was discriminatory, secular, and distanced Muslim students from Islamic values. This situation raised critical awareness among Muslim intellectuals that Muslims needed an alternative education system: one that was able to integrate Islamic values with modern scientific advances. It was from this concern that modern Islamic education began to be pioneered.

Historically, modern Islamic education in Indonesia was influenced by the Islamic reform movement in the Middle East. Reformers such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rasyid Ridha called for the importance of the revival of Muslims through education, rationality, and religious reform.

These ideas of renewal entered Indonesia through various channels, mainly through Nusantara students studying in Mecca and Egypt, as well as through Islamic print media such as magazines and translated books. These ideas were then adapted to the social and cultural context of Indonesia.

In Indonesia, the renewal of Islamic education was realized by Islamic figures and organizations. KH. Ahmad Dahlan, through Muhammadiyah (1912), became a central figure in the development of modern Islamic education. He established Islamic schools with a classical system, the use of desks and blackboards, a structured curriculum, and the inclusion of general subjects such as mathematics,

¹ Fahri Zulfikar, "Perkembangan Islam di Indonesia, Sejarah Awal hingga Masa Wali Songo," DetikEdu, 7 September 2021, diakses 4 Januari 2026, <https://www.detik.com/edu/detikpedia/d-5712586/perkembangan-islam-di-indonesia-sejarah-awal-hingga-masa-wali-songo>.

natural sciences, and foreign languages, without neglecting religious education and moral guidance. Education was seen as a means of da'wah and community empowerment.

Meanwhile, KH. Hasyim Asy'ari with Nahdlatul Ulama (1926) took a more gradual path of reform. Islamic boarding schools were retained as the basis of traditional Islamic education, but began to open up to the madrasah system, class levels, and the introduction of general subjects. This approach shows that the modernization of Islamic education does not necessarily mean abandoning tradition, but rather developing it to remain relevant.

Over time, modern Islamic education has developed in various forms, such as madrasahs, Islamic schools, and Islamic colleges. These institutions have become symbols of the synthesis between tradition and

modern not only focused on the transfer of knowledge, but also on the formation of morals, character, and social responsibility of students.

Thus, modern Islamic education in Indonesia was born as a historical response to the challenges of colonialism and modernity. It was not created to erase tradition, but to preserve Islamic morals so that they would remain alive amid the changing times. Modern Islamic education serves as a bridge between the past and the future, between the classical texts and the modern world, so that Muslims can progress without losing their identity.

3. Morals as the Core of Islamic Education

Morality occupies a central position in Islamic education because it is both the ultimate goal and the spirit that animates the entire educational process. Islamic education does not stop at the transfer of knowledge (cognitive), but is directed at the formation of the whole person—a person who is knowledgeable, faithful, and of noble character. In this framework, morality serves to complement knowledge so that it is not merely intelligent, but also useful and responsible.

➤ Why Morality is at the Core of Islamic Education

- ✓ Morality is the highest goal of Islamic education. One of the main goals of Islamic education is to shape individuals with noble character (*al-akhlāq al-karīmah*). This is in line with the mission of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, who emphasized that he was sent to perfect human morality. Thus, the success of Islamic education is not measured solely by academic

achievement, but by changes in the attitudes, behavior, and character of students.

- ✓ Morality as a controller of knowledge. Knowledge is essentially neutral, so it can be used for good or evil. Without morals, knowledge has the potential to be misused and actually cause damage. Morals act as a moral compass that ensures knowledge is applied correctly, fairly, and brings benefits to fellow human beings and the environment.
 - ✓ Morality as a reflection of faith. In Islam, faith is not only believed in the heart, but must be reflected in daily behavior. Good morals—such as honesty, compassion, and justice—are concrete evidence of a person's faith. Therefore, Islamic education emphasizes that strengthening faith must go hand in hand with moral development.
 - ✓ Morals as the basis for social harmony. Moral education aims to shape individuals who are ethical and have social responsibility. Individuals with noble morals will be able to live peacefully side by side, respect the rights of others, and contribute positively to society. Thus, morals become an important foundation in building a harmonious and civilized society.
- How Morals are Taught in Islamic Education
- The teaching of morals in Islamic education is carried out through several approaches.
- ✓ Teaching (ta'lim), which is the imparting of understanding about good and bad values based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. Students are introduced to the concepts of praiseworthy morals (maḥmūdah) and despicable morals (maẓmūmah) as a normative foundation.
 - ✓ Habituation (ta'wīd), which is training good behavior consistently and continuously from an early age. This habit formation includes honesty, discipline, mutual assistance, and responsibility in daily life. Through habit formation, moral values are not only understood but also become part of the students' personalities.
 - ✓ Exemplary behavior (uswah). Role modeling is the most effective method in moral education. Teachers and parents serve as real-life models for students. In this regard, the Prophet Muhammad SAW is the ultimate role model (uswah ḥasanah) who exemplifies moral perfection in all

aspects of life. Moral education would lose its meaning if it were not accompanied by real-life examples from educators.

✓ Moral Values Instilled

The moral values that are the focus of Islamic education include honesty (ṣidq), responsibility (amānah), politeness and patience (ḥilm), compassion (raḥmah), justice ('adl), and mutual assistance (ta'āwun). These values not only shape individual character, but also strengthen a social order based on ethics and humanity.²

4. Challenges of Islamic Education in the Modern Era

Islamic education in the modern era faces increasingly complex challenges in line with the rapid development of science, technology, and globalization. These challenges are not only technical in nature, but also touch on aspects of values, identity, and educational orientation. Therefore, Islamic education is required to continue to adapt in order to remain relevant without losing its basic values.

✓ The Main Challenges of Islamic Education in the Modern Era

✓ The dichotomy between religious and general knowledge. This separation has given rise to a partial view that religious knowledge only deals with spiritual aspects, while general knowledge is rational and worldly. As a result, Islamic education often fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of life, even though Islam views knowledge as a complementary whole.

✓ The challenge of technology integration. The development of digital technology brings both opportunities and threats. On the one hand, technology can be an effective and wide-reaching learning tool. However, on the other hand, students are vulnerable to exposure to negative content, misinformation, and instant culture. Islamic education is required not only to teach digital literacy but also to guide students to use technology ethically and responsibly.

² Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi dan Modernisasi Menuju Milenium Baru* (Jakarta: Logos Wacana Ilmu, 1999), hlm. 45–47.

³ Ibid., hlm. 53–56.

⁴ Ibid., hlm. 67–70.

⁵ Karel A. Steenbrink, *Pesantren, Madrasah, Sekolah: Pendidikan Islam dalam Kurun Modern* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1986), hlm. 23–25.

⁶ Haidar Putra Daulay, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Pembaruan Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2007), hlm. 60–63.

- ✓ Conflicting values and identity crisis. Globalization brings modern values such as individual freedom and moral relativism that sometimes clash with Islamic values. This condition can trigger a religious identity crisis, especially among the younger generation, who are at a crossroads between maintaining Islamic values and following the global cultural trend.
- ✓ Limitations in methodology and curriculum. Some Islamic educational institutions still apply rigid, memorization-oriented, and less contextual learning methods. Curricula that are not responsive to the needs of the digital generation make the learning process less interesting and less relevant to the realities of students' lives.
- ✓ Teacher quality and skills. Teachers have a strategic role in Islamic education, but there are still many educators who have not mastered technology and modern learning approaches. These competency limitations have an impact on the low effectiveness of technology integration and learning innovation.
- ✓ Funding and facility issues. The development of digital infrastructure, teacher training, and the provision of modern learning facilities require significant costs. Limitations
- ✓ Funding is often the main obstacle preventing Islamic educational institutions from developing optimally.
- ✓ Rigid patterns of religious interpretation. A textual approach that is not contextual can hinder the adaptation of Islamic education to changing times. This makes Islamic education seem closed and difficult to engage with modern realities.
- Solutions and Strategies for Facing Challenges
To address these challenges, strategic and sustainable measures are needed.
- ✓ Integration of religious and general knowledge through an approach of Islamization of science or integration of knowledge based on tawhid. This approach aims to build a holistic understanding that all knowledge leads to devotion to Allah and the benefit of humanity.
- ✓ Curriculum revitalization and utilization of technology. Digital technology needs to be utilized as a learning tool, such as online learning, interactive media, and digital educational content, without neglecting the instillation of Islamic values.

- ✓ Strengthening character and moral education. Noble character must be the main foundation for students to have spiritual and moral resilience in facing the era of disruption. Character education serves as a balance between intellectual intelligence and moral maturity.
- ✓ Improving teacher competence. Teachers need to be equipped with continuous training so that they are able to master technology, develop innovative learning methods, and become moral and spiritual guides for students in the digital world.
- ✓ Family and community involvement. Islamic education cannot be effective without the support of families. Families play a key role as role models in character building and strengthening Islamic values.
- ✓ Institutional adaptation and innovation. Islamic educational institutions must be open, innovative, and responsive to global changes, while maintaining the identity and core values of Islamic education.

Thus, the challenges of Islamic education in the modern era demand integrative and balanced reforms. Islamic education must be able to produce graduates who are intellectually superior, spiritually mature, and morally strong, so that they can play an active role in modern life without losing their Islamic identity.

5. The Relevance of Modern Islamic Education in Maintaining Morality

Modern Islamic education continues to have a very strong relevance in maintaining morality amid the complexities of contemporary life. The development of the times, marked by secularism, moral crisis, and the rapid flow of digital information, demands education that not only enlightens intellectually but also guides morally and spiritually. In this context, modern Islamic education plays a strategic role in preserving moral values so that they remain alive and contextual.

- ✓ Integration of universal and contextual values. Modern Islamic education seeks to internalize universal moral values sourced from the Qur'an and Sunnah—such as honesty, justice, compassion, and responsibility—into the realities of modern life.

- ✓ These values are not taught normatively, but are contextualized so that students are able to apply them in their social, professional, and digital lives. With this approach, morals are not understood as abstract concepts, but as practical guidelines in everyday life.
- ✓ A holistic approach to character building. Modern Islamic education emphasizes not only ritual worship (*ḥabl min Allāh*), but also social and human relations (*ḥabl min al-nās*). Character is understood as a comprehensive ethic that encompasses attitudes toward fellow human beings, society, the state, and the environment. This approach makes Islamic education more relevant in shaping individual piety as well as social piety.
- ✓ Development of critical literacy and digital ethics. In the digital age, students are faced with a flood of information, not all of which is educational. Modern Islamic education plays a role in equipping students with critical thinking skills so that they are able to filter information, combat disinformation, and avoid negative behavior in the digital space, such as hate speech, cyberbullying, and the spread of destructive content. This digital ethics is an important part of moral education in the modern era.
- ✓ Adaptive and resilient character building. Modern Islamic education aims to develop individuals who have a strong moral and religious identity, yet remain open to change and diversity. This character is important so that students do not easily lose their direction amid global ideological and cultural challenges, while avoiding extremism, whether in the form of radicalism or moral relativism.
- ✓ The role of modern Islamic education in the development of civilization. Good morals are the main foundation of a sustainable civilization. Modern Islamic education is relevant because it not only produces individuals who are spiritually pious, but also competent, have integrity, and are able to contribute positively to society and the global community. Thus, modern Islamic education serves as a driving force for the formation of well-rounded individuals who are both competitive and moral.

Thus, modern Islamic education acts as a moral compass that guides individuals in navigating the complexities of contemporary life. It ensures that progress does

not distance humans from ethical and spiritual values, but rather strengthens morals as the basis of personal and social life.³

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion outlined above, it can be concluded that Islamic education in Indonesia developed through a long and dynamic historical process. Since its arrival, Islam has spread not only through religious preaching, but also through trade, culture, education, and social approaches that are adaptive to the conditions of the archipelago. The role of the ulama and the Wali Songo shows that education and moral guidance are the main foundations in the process of spreading Islam in Indonesia.

In its development, Islamic education entered a modern phase in response to the challenges of colonialism and changing times. Modern Islamic education was born out of an awareness of the importance of reforming the education system so that Muslims could keep up with advances in science and technology without abandoning Islamic values. This reform effort did not aim to erase tradition, but rather to develop the legacy of Islamic education so that it remained relevant to the needs of modern society.

Morality occupies a central position in Islamic education because it is the ultimate goal of the entire educational process. Islamic education is not only oriented towards the mastery of knowledge, but also towards the formation of the character and personality of students. Knowledge without morals has the potential to be misused, so moral education serves as a guide so that knowledge brings benefits and welfare to life.

Amidst the currents of modernization and globalization, Islamic education faces various challenges, such as the separation of religious and general knowledge, the development of digital technology, and a crisis of values and identity among the younger generation. These challenges require Islamic education to continue to innovate through scientific integration, curriculum renewal, improvement of educator quality, and strengthening of character education based on morals.

Thus, modern Islamic education remains highly relevant in maintaining and instilling moral values in the contemporary era. Islamic education acts as a moral support that balances intellectual progress with spiritual maturity. Through an integrative and contextual

⁷ Ahmad Tafsir, *Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2013), hlm. 34–36.

⁸ Ibid., hlm. 98–101.

⁹ Muhammad Athiyah al-Abrasyi, *Dasar-Dasar Pokok Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1993), hlm. 15–18.

¹⁰ Abuddin Nata, *Pendidikan Islam di Era Global* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2018), hlm. 102–105.

approach, Islamic education is expected to produce a generation that is knowledgeable, has noble morals, and is ready to contribute positively to modern society.

REFERENCES

- Abuddin Nata. Pendidikan Islam di Era Global. Jakarta: Kencana, 2018.
- Muhammad Athiyah al-Abrasyi. Dasar-Dasar Pokok Pendidikan Islam. Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1993.
- Azyumardi Azra. Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi dan Modernisasi Menuju Milenium Baru. Jakarta: Logos Wacana Ilmu, 1999.
- Haidar Putra Daulay. Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Pembaruan Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia. Jakarta: Kencana, 2007.
- Karel A. Steenbrink. Pesantren, Madrasah, Sekolah: Pendidikan Islam dalam Kurun Modern. Jakarta: LP3ES, 1986.
- Ahmad Tafsir. Ilmu Pendidikan Islam. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2013.
- Fahri Zulfikar. "Perkembangan Islam di Indonesia, Sejarah Awal hingga Masa Wali Songo." DetikEdu, 7 September 2021. <https://www.detik.com/edu/detikpedia/d-5712586/perkembangan-islam-di-indonesia-sejarah-awal-hingga-masa-wali-songo> (diakses 4 Januari 2026).